

2016 NATIONAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM

I. General Information/Signatures

Nominee Name Amy Jo Meiners

Home Address [REDACTED]

Juneau, AK 99801 [REDACTED]
City State Zip Code Home Telephone

Social Security # [REDACTED] Date of Birth [REDACTED]

Email Address(es) [REDACTED] amyjo.meiners@juneauschools.org

Cell Phone Number [REDACTED]

School Name Auke Bay and Riverbend Elementary Schools

School Address 10014 Crazyhorse Drive

Juneau, AK 99801 (907) 796-5275
City State Zip Code Telephone

School Profile (check one): ~ Urban Suburban ~ Rural

Number of Students in Nominee's: District 4,800 Building Auke Bay: 377; Riverbend 311

Major Subject Area (if any) Extended Learning (Gifted and Talented) Grade Level 3rd-5th

Total Years of Teaching Experience 26 years Years in Present Position 9 years

I hereby give my permission that any or all of the attached materials (other than home address, telephone, SS# and DOB) may be shared with persons interested in promoting the National Teacher of the Year Program. I also acknowledge that if selected as the 2016 National Teacher of the Year, I will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of my recognition in order to fulfill the obligations inherent in the honor.

Signature of Candidate AJ Meiners Date 7/24/15

(Section I. continued - General Information/Signatures)

SCHOOL/BUILDING PRINCIPAL

Name Lori Hoover Title Principal

School Name Auke Bay Elementary School

School Address 10014 Crazyhorse Drive

Juneau, AK 99801 (907) 796-5275

City State Zip Code Telephone

I acknowledge that the nominee submits this application with my approval. If the nominee is selected as the 2016 National Teacher of the Year, he or she will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of recognition.

Signature of School Principal Lori Hoover Date 7.24.15

SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

Name Dr. Mark Miller Title Superintendent

District Name/Address Juneau School District

10014 Crazyhorse Drive

Juneau, AK 99801 (907) 523-1700

City State Zip Code Telephone

I acknowledge that the nominee submits this application with my approval. If the nominee is selected as the 2016 National Teacher of the Year he or she will be released from classroom responsibilities during the year of recognition.

Signature of District Superintendent Mark Miller Date 7/24/15

STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Name Atiya M. Barlow Title Coordinator

Agency Alaska Teacher of the Year Program

Address 344 West 3rd Ave. Suite 127

Anchorage, AK 99501 (907) 269-6579

City State Zip Code Telephone

Coordinator Signature _____ Date _____

II. Educational History and Professional Development Activities - (two double-spaced pages)

- A. Beginning with most recent, list colleges and universities attended including postgraduate studies. Indicate degrees earned and dates of attendance.

University of Alaska, 1982-2015, 108 credits in continuing education classes, including studies in fisheries, animal tracking, math, writing, art, early childhood, education for gifted and talented

Alaska Society for Technology in Education Conference, 2010

University of Connecticut, Confratute, 2009

National Association for Gifted Children Conference, 2009, 2006

National Staff Development Council Conference, 2007

Alaska State Writing Consortium, 2007, 1997

Alaska State Math Consortium, 2007

International Reading Association Conference, 2004

National Association for the Education of Young Children Conference, 2003, 1998, 1993

University of Illinois, Chicago, Math Trailblazers Summer Institute, 2002

Whitworth University, BA Elementary Education, Area of Concentration in English, 1984-1988

- B. Beginning with most recent, list teaching employment history indicating time, grade and subject.

2012-2015 Auke Bay and Riverbend Elementary Extended Learning 3rd-5th

2009 Camp Invention Co-Director

2006-2012 Auke Bay Elementary Extended Learning K-5

2006 Art in Nature Camp Director 3rd-5th grade

2005-2006 Auke Bay Elementary 2nd grade

1994-2005 Auke Bay Elementary 1st-2nd grade

1990-1994 Auke Bay Elementary 1st grade

1989-1990 Auke Bay Elementary 4th grade

- C. Beginning with most recent, list professional association memberships including information regarding offices held and other relevant activities.

Past member:

National Association for Gifted Children

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

International Reading Association

Alaska State Literacy Association (co-taught professional development sessions)

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Current member:

Juneau-Haines Reading Council (participant: service projects, professional learning)

Juneau Education Association (participant: service projects, professional learning)

Parent Teacher Association

D. Beginning with most recent, list staff development leadership activity and leadership activity in the training of future teachers.

Auke Bay Elementary Leadership team multiple years between 1994-2015

Auke Bay Elementary Math Cadre 2010-2013

Auke Bay Elementary Site Council representative

Juneau Economic Development Council Leadership Team 2009-2015

Juneau Economic Development Council training teachers in Engineering is Elementary program

Juneau Economic Development Council training coaches in FIRST Lego League program

Juneau School District Writing Cadre 2008-2011

Staff Collaboration Team (SCoTs) member

Juneau School District Staff Differentiation Specialist Trainer

Juneau School District Professional Development Committee

Juneau School District Extended Learning Plan Committee (2 cycles)

Mentor Teacher for multiple masters in teaching interns, student teachers and practicum teachers

Inservices at State, District, and Building level for Prof Dev in multiple areas, including: Science

in Nature, Writing, Spelling, Reading Comprehension, Language Development, Differentiation

Host Community Science, Math, Reading, Writing, Multi-age and Parenting Education Nights

Dan Bishop Bay Creek Trail committee (worked with multiple agencies to build school nature trail,

develop standards-based place-based curriculum, and assist in teacher training) 1990-1995

E. Beginning with the most recent, list awards and other recognition of your teaching.

Recognized by US Sen. Mark Begich, Alaska Senate Floor as outstanding teacher of STEM 2013

Juneau Economic Development Council FIRST Lego League Coach of the Year Award 2011

Auke Bay Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award 2006

III. Professional Biography - (two double-spaced pages) A. What were the factors that influenced you to become a teacher? Describe what you consider to be your greatest contributions and accomplishments in education.

There are several factors that influenced me to become a teacher. First, I grew up in a home that encouraged me to work hard, help others, and follow my passions. In my early years, my dad taught junior high biology and was also the outdoor education director, teaching camps for the Juneau School District with high school counselors and sixth-grade students. I remember students taking on different roles in the 1880s mining outdoor education camp and what it took to persevere through those days. I saw first hand the impact of teaching global concepts with critical thinking skills in a real-world setting within a multi-age context long before I knew any of those terms. In my middle years, my dad worked to create a nonprofit fish hatchery with grand economic goals, yet still kept a focus on education. In designing what is now the Macaulay Hatchery, Dad included a lab that could be shared with the university and a large center to support education of both tourists and students. Educating others about salmon, local habitat, and the economic impacts were part of his mission.

Second, I identify Mrs. Janie Cesar as a great influence to my teaching practices. Mrs. Cesar was my fourth-grade teacher at Glacier Valley elementary and she loved us. As a whole, we were a notoriously tough class to love. We retired our third-grade teacher. Our second-grade teacher tried the latest research on behavioral management with us. Mrs. Cesar was different. She was firm, consistent, and let us know daily that we were precious. She taught us math through sewing quilts and cooking. She brought in elders to share the art of carving and beading as we learned more through stories. We wrote about our experiences. Learning was important and it was fun. We worked hard for her because she demanded we do our best.

The final hook that encouraged my heart to become a teacher came during a practicum in rural Chattaroy, WA, with Ms. Libby's first grade class. The school was K-4 Title I with a shared principal at another school. Ms. Libby's classroom was print-rich and fully integrated with the students' interests. Attendance was high because the students were excited to come learn each day. I still remember how their eyes would light up with some new discovery they had made as though they were the first person to have this knowledge. These first-grade students produced plays about animals they had researched and performed in front of the school. They saw themselves as writers, as performers, as a team, as important

learners. I knew then that I wanted to be a part of this learning. I wanted to work hard, to help others, and to passionately share learning.

Now, after 26 years of teaching, I still want to work hard, help others, and follow this continued passion of learning. One of my greatest contributions in education is to encourage those around me: students, colleagues, administrators, and community members alike, to keep learning. Change isn't easy, and sometimes even the discussions are beyond uncomfortable; however, change is inevitable and we are better served if we approach it as a positive, learning opportunity. As I have moved from intermediate to primary to multi-age to gifted education, I have continued to learn. As our times change, families change, technologies change, it's important that education be reflective of current needs. As educators, we must keep asking questions to learn how we can better serve in this ever-changing world. I believe it is an important contribution to the field of education to keep people moving forward in creating the best educational system possible to meet the growing needs of all children.

One of my greatest accomplishments comes in still passionately seeking how to make each student feel precious and demand hard work as they help others and find their own passions, owning their learning so it becomes a lifelong journey. Just this past April, my third- to fifth-grade students created a public display of American History projects, including a guest book for public comments. Each student took home a copy of the public comments with my foreword: "... I hope you are able to see that you have the power to make an impact on others. In sharing your work, take pride in knowing that you did your best ... As you move on next year, I encourage you to own your learning. Continue to be curious, ask questions, and search for answers. Share your discoveries with others to better learn from one another. Look at works of art in a new way to challenge your thinking. What else do you wonder? Find your grit to persevere through a challenge toward a goal you've set. What do you want to discover next? Go for it! Share it!" There is a balance in setting learning goals in a way that both challenges and engages each learner to develop his or her intrinsic motivation to keep learning, keep improving, keep finding creative solutions as new problems arise. My greatest accomplishment has been guiding students in a way that extends their intellectual, social, and emotional learning, finding their own passions to continue their independent learning.

IV. Community Involvement - (one double-spaced page) A. Describe your commitment to your community through service-oriented activities such as volunteer work, civic responsibilities and other group activities.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead

I believe community service is crucial to the development of both the individual and the community. We have better communities in which to live when we work together to make our communities better. As a founding family member of a nonprofit hatchery, Douglas Island Pink and Chum, Inc. (DIPAC), I've served on the board of directors for more than 30 years, currently as Secretary. My contributions through committee work focus on Education, Finance, and Harvest. As part of DIPAC, we provide community service in multiple ways: sharing fish with elders, hosting annual community fishing day and Juneau Appreciation Day, working with Department of Fish and Game on community projects in Southeast locations, hosting high school interns for projects including mentors, sponsoring fish culture classes between Sitka Sound Science Center and Juneau high schools, providing sea week education and bus transportation for local schools, and sponsoring undergraduate scholarships and graduate fellowships. As a member of DIPAC, I am committed to actively serving our southeast community.

I have also served through local churches, including Northern Light United Church as a Youth Group Leader, 1988-1991, working with middle and high school youth on community service projects. I also served as an Elder, 1992-1996, including work on a pastor search committee. At Chapel by the Lake, 2001-2015, I've shared in service on Women's WORD Retreat teams. As a Whitworth University alum, I served as Community Day of Service Juneau Project Coordinator, 2015. I gathered a group to work in coordination with LOVE, Inc., delivering furniture and goods to those in need, as other Whitworth alum around the world found ways to serve in their communities on the Day of Service, March 28.

I also volunteer with the Juneau Economic Development Council, coaching FIRST Lego League Robotics, sharing the Engineering is Elementary program, assisting Community Science Nights, and providing Think Tank Support Group Leadership. My civic responsibility has included testifying about educational matters at the Juneau School Board and the Alaska State Legislature. Serving my community in multiple ways is an important part of who I am and demonstrates how I believe each person can make a positive change in the world.

V. Philosophy of Teaching - (two double-spaced pages)

- A. Describe your personal feelings and beliefs about teaching, including your own ideas of what makes you an outstanding teacher. Describe the rewards you find in teaching.
- B. How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in your personal teaching style?

“One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.” Carl Jung

I believe teaching provides a great opportunity to influence the future. Each young child is important and will in some way affect our world. As a teacher, I have the chance to inspire curiosity and lifelong learning; therefore, questioning skills, along with reasoning, integrating, and adapting, are key elements within my teaching practice. To this end, I believe starting with students’ interests and personal goals, knowing their needs and challenges, is critical to make learning meaningful with skills that transfer to real life. As a teacher, I must create a compassionate classroom culture that embraces the joy of ownership in learning while inspiring creativity, critical thinking, and expressing thoughts and feelings in imaginative ways. I work to foster a connection to place, culture, and history where academic and arts integration in all disciplines is delivered through best instructional practices.

I value the importance of identifying the social/emotional needs of students and their academic needs, and carefully craft lessons to scaffold their learning as they strive toward a known goal. In working with academically identified gifted students, I’ve discovered that social skills such as how to be included in a group and how to include others may need more direct instruction than academic skills for some students. I think of Zach, a third-grade student, who could recite American History facts unbeknownst to most adults, but was a lost soul on the playground. For his success, and others, it is critical that my classroom embed learning academic, social, and emotional skills in a respectful, engaging manner.

Each student I work with knows that I respect their ability to learn and their contributions to the classroom. One of the ways I seek to empower students is to allow them the opportunity to guide the learning goals. For example, students had expressed curiosity about water in our world and we began to look globally at how water is used and transported, including lessons from the Engineering is Elementary kit from the Museum of Science, Boston. My students asked to extend the lessons by bringing in neighborhood samples of water from a lake, a bay, the ocean, a river, and a backyard pond, and testing

their water quality. They ran various chemical tests and recorded and compared their data. Chad, a third-grade student, expressed concern at the apparent lack of phosphorous in the bay sample and immediately formulated questions such as, "Was our test valid? Did it make a difference to gather the water sample at the surface rather than deeper in the bay? Could the results be impacted by the local boats in the bay, which may have waste, gas, or oil discharge? Who can we talk to to learn more about the presence of phosphorous in water?" After discussing their water questions and observations with Bob, a guest scientist, Maggie, a fifth-grade student, asked if he would like to view her science notebook entry for her home experiment on displacement. She shared that she had worked on it for fun with her dad, teaching him how scientists share their work in diagrams, lists, procedures and such. It is these such shared acts of inspiration and curiosity that are my reward in teaching.

Engaging students in their own learning and fostering a positive relationship with students and their families are key elements that Dr. Robert J. Marzano identifies for student success and best instructional practice. As I work to integrate within our classroom experiences, these two elements are at the forefront of each learning goal, academic or social/emotional. As my students created a museum featuring a doll representing different cultures made by every K-5 student in the school, they learned about the different careers within the museum industry. They also researched various museum types and how displays are created, interviewed museum curators, used the K-5 students' dolls to create cultural displays, and then staged and serviced a Museum Open House for the local community. They created a slideshow to share the process of their museum creation. There were multiple problems to solve along the way, and students had to work together to create workable solutions for this real-world context. Through rigorous standards, culturally relevant experiences, technology and arts integration, and creative, self-driven learning, my students will have the foundation to become life-long learners, responsible citizens, and productive members of society.

VI. Education Issues and Trends - (two double-spaced pages) A. What do you consider to be the major public education issues today? Address **one** in depth, outlining possible causes, effects and resolutions.

There are many issues in public education today, including accountability, teacher effectiveness, the achievement gap, equity, Common Core, and assessment. As budgets decline, states look for cost-saving measures to provide a good education for all students, preparing them for the world of work. The job market has changed dramatically since the design of the American school system from a need for routine skills to a need for technical skills, and the educational system must change to meet those demands. At the heart of it, nationally we need to find a way to hold schools accountable for providing all students with an education that matters in today's world.

In an effort to hold schools accountable for educating students, states have selected assessments that are efficient and easily standardized with inter-rater reliability. Although accountability is important, nationally we have targeted those skills most easily tested for data points: basic mathematical computation and phonetic decoding. From these assessment results, curricular programs are chosen to best increase the students' results. If we follow the trail between testing and curricular programs designed to improve those limited data points, we see that this is not a worthwhile accountability measure. Both Education Secretary Arne Duncan and President Obama have noted that there is too heavy an emphasis on testing, which can be detrimental to students. They've proposed state waivers in exchange for teacher and principal evaluation systems including some form of student outcome measurement.

It is difficult to create accountability data points for what we truly want in education. We want flexible thinkers. We want adaptive problem solvers. These are not skills readily measured in quick, standardized, reliable ways. It may be efficient to measure decoding, and although there is value in assessing that skill for pre- and early readers, its data point for the gifted fifth-grade reader is useless. In fact, that gifted fifth-grade reader has just figured out that if this assessment is useless, perhaps all assessments are useless. Now the data points don't even show what we think they show. In our striving to be held accountable in education, perhaps we've missed the target.

I believe it is important to hold schools accountable. As a nation, we need to take another look at exactly what it is that schools should be held accountable for and focus curricular programs designed to increase learning toward those accountability goals. Then, we should select assessments that support those goals, perhaps using anecdotal evidence, student-created assessments, or portfolios

demonstrating mastery. Accountability needs to shift to less on single-event high-stakes assessments and increasingly on multiple measures that demonstrate a broader, more balanced view of achievement. Data points like graduation rates tell us about problems after it's too late to help students. We can do better by focusing on early indicators and predictors of success in what we value for children. What is it that makes schools effective and how is that best measured?

A strong background and interest in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) education is critical for students' success in today's world. The incoming workforce needs a solid foundation in STEAM areas to be able to meet the demands of the 21st century. Many states are already embedding STEAM into the curriculum. For example, as the wood and metal shops of the digital age, Makerspaces are considered a cost-effective approach in some districts for creating meaningful learning experiences that allow students to explore their passions. Students acquire real-world skills using technology to invent something. I have found great success in incorporating both the Engineering is Elementary curriculum from the Boston Museum of Science and the FIRST Lego League program as a means to developing students' critical and creative thinking skills, curiosity, and perseverance. We know that STEAM education provides the necessary environment, challenge, and learning for students. As a nation, we need to come together—teachers, administrators, students, and policy makers—to determine how we can most appropriately hold schools accountable for effectively providing STEAM education. There must be accountability, but the goals for which schools are being held accountable need to reflect the long-term goals we have for our students. We need to be sure that what we are measuring is what we value and in turn that what we value is indeed what we are measuring.

How do we measure curiosity or perseverance? Critical thinking or creativity? Our evaluation systems need careful design implementation as we consider relevant goals for our schools, including what is best for students and most effective for teachers. Nationally, we must find a way to hold schools accountable for providing a relevant education for all students so that each may become a healthy, productive member of society able to be successful in the current global economy.

VII. The Teaching Profession - (two double-spaced pages) A. What do you do to strengthen and improve the teaching profession? B. What is and/or what should be the basis for accountability in the teaching profession?

To strengthen and improve the teaching profession I continue to research how to best meet the needs of students, apply what I've learned within my classroom while collaborating with others, and then reflect on and share what I've experienced. Scientists are still discovering new nuances of how the brain works, how pathways are more efficiently formed, and connections for linguistic and mathematical development. There is still much to be learned about teaching students of poverty and of trauma. As our world changes, it's important to keep informed as to what strategies are most effective given new understandings and new circumstances.

I value the book groups I've participated in with colleagues, both the sessions to come together to analyze student work and the video critique discussions. Teaching in front of one another and having time to share and set smart goals reflective of my own professional needs has made me a better teacher. In my early years, I taught on a team of four first-grade teachers. We created what we called Friday Fun Days. Each teacher on the team planned, prepared, organized, and taught one Friday each month for all four classes. The Thursday before our teaching day, the responsible teacher would share the integrated lesson plans with the team. The team then critiqued the plans and adjusted as necessary. On your Friday, you taught the lesson to the classes in front of the teachers, and when the day was over, we'd share observations and recommendations as a team. This format proved to be essential in my professional development. It was embedded in reality, practiced daily, and required me to work as a team without the option of closing my door alone and teaching my own way. It made me define and defend my practice. It taught me to be a better observer of student and teacher behavior. It gave me insight into different management techniques and approach to content. It gave me ownership of the entire grade level instead of just the students who walked through my door. It allowed us to feed off of each other's strengths. Now, as I've studied more about Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), I realize that is the beauty of what we shared then.

In the teaching profession, educators should be held accountable for best teaching practices defined by current and well-grounded research according to their job assignment. I believe this is most effectively done at a local level where sites are able to consider the needs of their own community.

Although there are overarching elements that define good teaching as identified by the likes of Marzano et al., I believe we also need to consider what is good teaching within an assigned context. A high school chemistry teacher, a special needs preschool teacher, and a librarian each should be held accountable to teach to the needs of their position. Creating a standardized one-size-fits-all evaluation tool for all educators becomes cumbersome and meaningless, as administrators are required to complete the same 61-point check-off list for the variety of positions within their site. Working within PLCs specifically designed to set relevant smart goals and provide training based on the educators' and students' needs has proven to increase teacher effectiveness more than an administrative annual observation. Educators need to be held accountable for effective teaching, but how America goes about that task needs more defining work by stakeholders.

Accountability applies to both schools and educators. We need to hold schools accountable for the elements that we value as a means of producing successful graduates who are able to live and work as healthy contributors in today's global economy. Given that critical thinking skills and creativity with traits of perseverance and curiosity are current demands of the world of work, schools should be held accountable for providing such an education. Exactly how those 21st century skills are to be measured is yet to be uniformly agreed upon; however, local sites should be empowered to determine how to show performance outcomes toward those goals. Currently, I teach at two schools daily. Each has very different strengths and weaknesses; their communities have different needs. I believe it would be most helpful if, like teachers, each school could design its own smart goals with stakeholder input based on their needs, and then be held accountable to working toward those goals. Setting broad, generic goals for all schools in a standardized approach may have an appearance of striving toward accountability, but I'm not sure that in reality it helps improve schools to be the best they can be. In the end, accountability should be about holding each school responsible to provide the best education possible. With our diverse needs, we need to allow for diverse measures.

Webster defines accountability as an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions. As we continue the process of implementing accountability systems, we need to be sure that stakeholders have a voice and the measure is meaningful. Schools and educators at the local level need to have clear goals and a means to work effectively toward those valued outcomes.

VIII. National Teacher of the Year - (one double-spaced page) A. As the 2016 National Teacher of the Year, you would serve as a spokesperson and representative for the entire teaching profession. What would be your message? What would you communicate to your profession and to the general public?

It would be an honor to serve as a spokesperson representing the entire teaching profession. We have a remarkable profession and I want others to know how exciting it is. There are many outstanding teachers, and I want us to collectively start sharing our stories about the noble adventure that is teaching. If we want to encourage those who can to come join us and teach, if we want to encourage retention of new teachers, we need to give voice to the joy of teaching. In what can sometimes seem like a negative deluge of public education bashing, the positive light of all that is possible for the future of our younger generations needs to be set on fire. I stand before you, thrilled to be a teacher.

I'm inspired by the teacher next door. Her name is Allison Neussl and I hope you get the chance to teach with her or teach with someone like her. She is fresh out of college and eager to try out all she has learned in her teacher training, and more than that, she has a keen sense of intuition to help her quickly identify students' needs and what she needs to do to scaffold their learning. I share the room next door to her with our elementary coach, and the two of us are seasoned enough to have seen the education pendulum swing a time or two or five. We work at not being cynical to change. We can't help but pause and reflect on our practice when we see Ms. Neussl in action. It's the way she greets her first-grade students as they come in from each recess. It's the way she animatedly reads aloud, teaching skills along the way. It's the way she engages every student, creating great anticipation for eager students who believe they are capable learners. It's the way she questions, monitors, adjusts, and reflects. She is an amazing teacher and I have much to learn from her. I want to be sure she stays in this profession, and I want others like her to be attracted to this profession.

My message is that there are many outstanding teachers around us in public education, working hard to best prepare the future generation of American citizens. Their stories need to be told. I think of Mrs. Hanna who brought to life the importance of early childhood education, Mrs. Young who labored over each hand-sewn book for her children authors, Mrs. Nelson who brought math and the real world together, and Mr. Koelsch who taught each student to write well and to exercise their right to vote. I could go on, as could each of you. And that is my point: the teaching profession is an honorable, exciting, ever-changing career choice and we need to encourage and support those around us.



JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

Auke Bay Elementary School

10014 Crazy Horse Drive • Juneau, Alaska 99801 • 907-463-1775 • Fax: 907-463-1751
10014 Crazy Horse Drive, Juneau, Alaska 99801 Phone: 907-796-5275

July 10, 2015

As a school leader I have the opportunity to visit numerous classrooms throughout the day. More often than not, I find myself in AmyJo Meiners' classroom; always knowing I will be engaged and learn something right alongside her students.

I am delighted to write this reference letter for AmyJo Meiners as a candidate for the Alaska Teacher of the Year Award. Since becoming the principal of Auke Bay Elementary school in 2007, I have had opportunity to observe, evaluate and work with Ms. Meiners. Thus, I feel very confident in giving this recommendation.

Ms. Meiners understands the needs of gifted learners. Her students need learning experiences that are rich and relevant to their lives. Her classroom is respectful and provides both structure and choice to help them achieve more than they thought they could. She paces the instruction so that students can achieve a greater depth of understating while taking risks. She guides students and encourages them to take risks, work independently, as well as how to work with others.

Throughout the year, AmyJo can be counted on to provide leadership and mentoring to other general education teachers as well as other gifted and talented teachers in the school district. She has been a member of the school leadership team and can be counted on to give sage advice!

AmyJo is an ardent advocate for excellent public education. She testifies at school board meetings and at the Alaska Legislature. Her testimony reflects her passion for education and the need for all students to have a quality public education.

Thank you for this opportunity to brag on my friend, colleague, and consummate professional. I am honored to have her teach at Auke Bay Elementary.

Sincerely,

Lori Hoover, Principal Auke Bay Elementary

July 16, 2015

To Alaska Teacher of the Year Selection Committee:

We are honored to share our support and appreciation for Amy Jo Meiners. We have known Amy Jo as a teacher since our oldest child started elementary school six years ago. She has taught two of our three children as part of the Extended Learning program at Auke Bay Elementary. Our Native Alaskan children tend to be reserved and quiet. Amy Jo's insight into her students' personalities and learning styles helps provide a safe and encouraging learning environment. Amy Jo is compassionate, personable, genuine, and determined to help each of her students realize his/her potential.

As she often shares, Amy Jo is inspired by her students' abilities and appreciates the opportunities to learn from them as they learn from her. Even with 26 years of teaching experiences, Amy Jo continues to reflect and incorporate new and relevant teaching practices into her lessons -- we have particularly valued her including Artful Thinking (strategies that extend and deepen students' thinking) and STEM concepts in her classroom, as well as designing School-wide Enrichment Clusters, which allow all Auke Bay students an opportunity to be creative.

Amy Jo has been a consistent education advocate and recognizes that community partnerships enhance learning, particularly at a time when Alaska's education dollars face potential reduction. These collaborative experiences extend classroom learning into real world examples. In one instance, Amy Jo partnered with Juneau Economic Development Corporation (JEDC) to develop physics lessons, including Newton's laws of motion. The lessons led up to *Roller Coaster Riot*, a daylong capstone event where students were placed in teams to design and build their own miniature roller coasters out of paper and tape.

Our son, Alex, was a student in Ms. Meiners's third grade Extended Learning class last year. He shares, "I'm proud to be writing this letter, because Ms. Meiners is kind, smart and respectful to us. I feel happy and proud that I get to go to Ms. Meiners's class. My favorite project in her class was the windmill project, because it was challenging and fun at the same time. I was always asking a lot of questions about the designs I created. When Ms. Meiners teaches us, she makes us feel good about learning new things. It's not easy work but Ms. Meiners makes me feel like I know I can do it. It's challenging and fun and very, very interesting."

Our daughter, Addy, shares her perspectives. "Before third grade, when I first started going to Mrs. Meiners's room for a portion of each day, I liked learning, but never loved it. She taught her students with respect, encouraged us to do our best, and introduced new concepts that captured our curiosity. Mrs. Meiners made learning fun. Instead of telling us 'this is how you do it,' she would ask questions to lead us in figuring things out ourselves. Mrs. Meiners taught us physics in third grade, and it made me feel like I could learn anything that I put my mind to.

"During my time with Mrs. Meiners, my academics grew to new heights as well as my social skills. After learning some of her students were spending their recess with the same group of friends or reading books, she spoke to our class about the importance of going beyond our comfort zones to connect with others. Often times, Mrs. Meiners would ask us to think about who we would play with and what we would do at our next recess. This helped me to become more aware of different personalities, and I started to play with different people.

"Mrs. Meiners used what she called a fishbowl process to teach us to be intentional in our speaking, and be aware of how our classmates each participated. Speaking this way helped us all become more patient and open-minded with each other. As an almost sixth grader going into middle school, the skills Mrs. Meiners has taught me about being friendly to everyone and others' personalities and feelings will come in handy. Mrs. Meiners encouraged us to be curious and to ask questions, to take hold of our own learning, share with others and to challenge ourselves. All the projects she has done with us have helped me understand this even better."

Amy Jo instills a motivation in her students to continue to learn, to wonder, to work collaboratively, and to be accountable for their learning and actions. We are grateful she has been such an important part of our children's education.



This image is a self-portrait done by Addy during a 5th grade art lesson. Addy included names of people she has learned from in the 'crazy hair'. Our family whole-heartedly believes Amy Jo is deserving of the statewide recognition Alaska Teacher of the Year offers and that her passion and intellect would be an asset to efforts advocating for children and education throughout the state.

Sincerely,

Anthony and Amanda Mallott

July 14, 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

Kiah writes: The world needs teachers. You cannot measure the value of a teacher that awakens the imagination and creativity inside a child, and instills a love of learning to all students they mentor. This type of teacher helps plant a seed that grows within a child and blossoms into a bright future. This is the exact type of teacher Amy Jo Meiners is, and is why I think Ms. Meiners would be an excellent choice for Alaska's Teacher of the Year.

I have been in Ms. Meiners' class since kindergarten, and have come to enjoy her lessons that are taught with an unflinching confidence and grace that many teachers don't possess. She teaches critical thinking skills through challenging lessons created to help students think outside of the box, and helps them see things from different angles. One of the many qualities I appreciate about Ms. Meiners is her reasonable and fair ways. She always takes time to consider the decisions she makes and gives the class a say in each one. Ms. Meiners expects her students to do their best and to try hard to reach their goals.

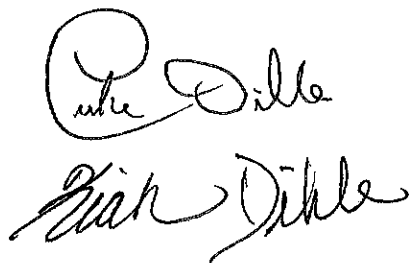
Ms. Meiners is very inspiring and influential and has changed my learning experience in many different ways. I know that Ms. Meiners will have hundreds of people remember her as an incredibly patient, persevering, involved and dedicated teacher who made a huge impact in their life. Ms. Meiners will continue to improve Alaska's schools for the rest of her career because of her love of teaching and her students. As I move on to middle school I will always remember what an incredible role model she was to me, and use the skills she taught me. I strongly feel that Amy Jo Meiners would be an excellent choice for Alaska Teacher of the Year.

Luke writes: The year was 1989, Ms. Meiners' first year of teaching, and I was in her 4th grade class. Even as a 9-year-old boy I immediately sensed this brand new teacher exuded a quiet confidence that radiated competence. During that year Ms Meiners was able to get me to try things I would have never dreamed of before, including standing up in front of the entire school and reciting poetry. When our class no longer wanted to go to the library due to problems with our librarian, Ms Meiners did not simply squelch our rebellion. Instead she listened to our concerns and taught us how to voice our perceptions in an organized and mature fashion. She expected more from us, and knew how to get it out of us.

After 4th grade I lost touch with Ms. Meiners but never forgot her. Twenty years later we met again as my daughter became her student. To put it bluntly, my daughter loves Ms. Meiners. This love is not for a superficial reason such as candy parties or allowing students to watch movies. Quite the opposite. Ms. Meiners' high expectations combined with her kind demeanor has ignited curiosity and creativity inside Kiah. I think often as girls grow towards their teen years they feel self-conscious of being labeled "smart". I feel very blessed that Kiah has had Ms. Meiners as a role model to show her it is good to be a confident, "smart", young lady. Ms. Meiners is from an Alaskan family, and returned to Alaska to teach and contribute to our state. If there was ever a teacher who deserves to be Alaska Teacher of the Year, my wife, child and I believe it is Ms. Meiners.

Sincerely,

Luke and Kiah Dihle

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is for Luke Dihle, written in a cursive style. The bottom signature is for Kiah Dihle, also in cursive. The signatures are positioned to the right of the typed name 'Luke and Kiah Dihle'.